

Minutes (unofficial)

Maryland Council for New Americans

Citizenship Working Group

March 20, 2009

Montgomery County Office of Neighborhood Partnerships

Gustavo Torres, Chair

1. Welcome and introductions

In attendance: Gustavo Torres, Anna Anderson, Lydia Esponosa, Catherine Hester, Kaori Hirakawa, Angela Lagdameo, David Lee, Eliza Leighton, Aris Mardirossian, Jessy Mejia, Akinwale Ojomo, Lily Qi, Walter Rodriguez, Naima Said, Karla Silvestre, Benoy Thomas, Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt

2. Minutes were approved.

3. Presentations by CASA de Maryland: Report on State Program Models, Barriers to Naturalization Process, New Americans Initiative.

Anna Anderson and Eliza Leighton presented citizenship program description/history, funding, recommendations and future plans from Massachusetts, Illinois, Washington, and California. Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt requested that more information be available surrounding the steps it took for each of the programs to develop. Other group members also asked for costs per unit and information on multiple-language hotlines.

Based on the experiences of other states and service organizations in the Maryland New Americans Partnership, barriers to the naturalization process and recommendations for Maryland were presented. Findings include: Lack of coordinated public education campaign and naturalization service delivery, legal barriers, fear of exposure and experience of discrimination, lack of English language skills, and prohibitively expensive costs. Akinwale Ojomo stressed the difficulty of the language barrier for African. Karla Silvestre also stressed the difficulty of travel to Baltimore; in addition to other recommendations, a possible recommendation is to have the citizenship program housed in Montgomery County and Prince George's County a few times a week.

4. Revisit timeline; update on focus group recommendation, and other recommendations.

The timeline was agreed upon. Due to constraints of time and upon the recommendation of Lily Qi and Karla Silvestre and discussion of the group, the Working Group will set

aside time in the future to break into subcommittees for more thorough look at each of the recommendations presented. Angela Lagdameo stated that funding does not currently exist to focus groups of service providers in a timely manner. David Lee wanted to further field test the recommendations. The recommendations will be presented and reviewed by MNAP organizations as well as other organizations and stakeholders recommended by Pat hatch.

5. Draft outline of report for Governor O'Malley

The working group felt it was important to frame the report with the future projection of needs. Example of needs included citizenship, benefits, and mainstreaming citizens to be full contributors to Maryland by voting, service, etc.

6. Other business

The Working Group will look forward to having presentations from other states such as Illinois to make determinations of best recommendations.

7. Next meeting

Adventist Health Care

12-2pm (immediately following the Council meeting)

Room TBA

The meeting adjourned at 10:30am